



COBB'S BILL-OF-FARE

Cobb.s Bill-of-fare

Irvin S. 1876-1944 Cobb


Nabu Public Domain Reprints:

You are holding a reproduction of an original work published before 1923 that is in the public domain in the United States of America, and possibly other countries. You may freely copy and distribute this work as no entity (individual or corporate) has a copyright on the body of the work. This book may contain prior copyright references, and library stamps (as most of these works were scanned from library copies). These have been scanned and retained as part of the historical artifact.

This book may have occasional imperfections such as missing or blurred pages, poor pictures, errant marks, etc. that were either part of the original artifact, or were introduced by the scanning process. We believe this work is culturally important, and despite the imperfections, have elected to bring it back into print as part of our continuing commitment to the preservation of printed works worldwide. We appreciate your understanding of the imperfections in the preservation process, and hope you enjoy this valuable book.

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2021 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/isbn_9781176343191

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

By

Irvin S. Cobb

Author of

"The Escape of Mr. Trimm," "Back Home,"
"Cobb's Anatomy," etc.

Illustrated by

Peter Newell and James Preston



New York

George H. Doran Company

**COPYRIGHT, 1911-1912,
BY THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY**

**COPYRIGHT, 1913,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY**

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

TO
R. H. DAVIS
(NOT RICHARD HARDING—
THE OTHER ONE)

New York
George H. Duran Company

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

AS FOLLOWS

	PAGE
I. VITTLES	13
II. MUSIC	47
III. ART	81
IV. SPORT	113

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"I now greatly desire to eat some regular food."	15
"Those who in the goodness of their hearts may undertake a search for the sucking pig."	35
"Where do you find the percentage of dyspeptics running highest?"	41
"She tries to tear all its front teeth out with her bare hands."	51
"Ro-hocked in the cra-hadle of the da-heep, I la-hay me down in pe-heace to sa-leep!"	57
"Shem undoubtedly sang it when the animals were hungry."	61
"And I enjoy it more than words can tell!"	67
"We looked in vain for the kind of pictures that mother used to make and father used to buy."	83
"The inscrutable smile of a saleslady would make Mona Lisa seem a mere amateur."	93
"A person who for reasons best known to the police has not been locked up."	97

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

ILLUSTRATIONS—Continued

	PAGE
"Collision between two heavenly bodies or premature explosion of a custard pie."	103
"Everything you catch is second-hand."	119
"He could beat me climbing, but at panting I had him licked to a whisper."	125
"She was not much larger than a soapdish "	137
"Think of being laid face downward firmly across a sinewy knee and beaten forty-love with one of those hard catgut rackets!"	143

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

VITTLES



Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

Vittles

UPON a certain gladsome occasion a certain man went into a certain restaurant in a certain large city, being imbued with the idea that he desired a certain kind of food. Expense was with him no object. The coming of the holidays had turned his thoughts backward to the care-free days of boyhood and he longed for the holidaying provender of his youth with a longing that was as wide as a river and as deep as a well.

"Me, I have tried it all," he said to himself. "I have been down the line on this eating proposition from alphabet soup to animal crackers. I know the whole thing, from the nine-dollar, nine-course banquet, with every course bathed freely in the same kind of sauce and tasting exactly like all the other courses, to the quick lunch, where the

14 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

only difference between clear soup and beef broth is that if you want the beef broth the waiter sticks his thumb into the clear soup and brings it along.

"I have feasted copiously at grand hotels where they charge you corkage on your own hot-water bottle, and I have dallied frugally with the forty-cent table d'hôte with wine, when the victuals were the product of the well-known Sam Brothers—Flot and Jet—and the wine tasted like the stuff that was left over from graining the woodwork for a mahogany finish.

"I now greatly desire to eat some regular food, and if such a thing be humanly possible I should also prefer to eat it in silence unbroken except by the noises I make myself. I have eaten meals backed up so close to the orchestra that the leader and I were practically wearing the same pair of suspenders. I have been howled at by a troupe of Sicilian brigands armed with their national weapons—the garlic and the guitar. I have been tortured by mechanical pianos and automatic melodeons, and I crave quiet. But in any event I want food. I cannot



"I NOW GREATLY DESIRE TO EAT
SOME REGULAR FOOD"

spare the time to travel nine hundred miles to get it, and I must, therefore, take a chance here."

So, as above stated, he entered this certain restaurant and seated himself; and as soon as the Hungarian string band had desisted from playing an Italian air orchestrated by a German composer he got the attention of an omnibus, who was Greek, and the bus enlisted the assistance of a side waiter, he being French, and the side waiter in time brought to him the head waiter, regarding whom I violate no confidence in stating that he was Swiss. The man I have been quoting then drew from his pockets a number of bank notes and piled them up slowly, one by one, alongside his plate. Beholding the denominations of these bills the head waiter with difficulty restrained himself from kissing the hungry man upon the bald spot on his head. The sight of a large bill invariably quickens the better nature of a head waiter.

"Now, then," said the enhungered one, "I would have speech with you. I desire food—food suitable for a free-born American

18 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

stomach on such a day as this. No, you needn't wave that menu at me. I can shut my eyes and remember the words and music of every menu that ever was printed. I don't know what half of it means because I am no court interpreter, but I can remember it. I can sing it, and if I had my clarinet here I could play it. Heave the menu over the side of the boat and listen to me. What I want is just plain food—food like mother used to make and mother's fair-haired boy used to eat. We will start off with turkey—turkey *a la* America, understand; turkey that is all to the Hail Columbia, Happy Land. With it I want some cramberry sauce—no, not cranberry, I guess I know it's real name—some cramberry sauce; and some mashed potatoes—mashed with enthusiasm and nothing else, if you can arrange it—and some scalloped oysters and maybe a few green peas. Likewise I want a large cup of coffee right along with these things—not served afterward in a misses' and children's sized cup, but along with the dinner.”

“Salad?” suggested the head waiter, re-

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 19

luctantly withdrawing his fascinated vision from the pile of bills. "Salad?" he said.

"No salad," said the homesick stranger, "not unless you could chop me up some lettuce and powder it with granulated sugar and pour a little vinegar over it and bring it in to me with the rest of the grub. Where I was raised we always had chewing tobacco for the salad course, anyhow."

The head waiter's whole being recoiled from the bare prospect. He seemed on the point of swooning, but looked at the money and came to.

"Dessert?" he added, poising a pencil.

"Well," said the man reflectively, "I don't suppose you could fix me up some ambrosia—that's sliced oranges with grated cocoanut on top. And in this establishment I doubt if you know anything about boiled custard, with egg kisses bobbing round it and sunken reefs of sponge cake underneath. So I guess I'd better compromise on some plum pudding; but mind you, not the imported English plum pudding. English plum pudding is not a food, it's a missile, and when eaten it is a concealed deadly weapon I

20 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

want an American plum pudding. Mark well my words—an American plum pudding.

“And,” he concluded, “if you can bring me these things, just so, without any strange African sauces or weird Oriental fixings or trans-Atlantic goo stirred into them or poured on to them or breathed upon them, I shall be very grateful to you, and in addition I shall probably make you independently wealthy for life.”

It was quite evident that the head waiter regarded him as a lunatic—perhaps only a lunatic in a mild form and undoubtedly one cushioned with ready money—but nevertheless a lunatic. Yet he indicated by a stately bow that he would do the best he could under the circumstances, and withdrew to take the matter up with the house committee.

“Now this,” said the man, “is going to be something like. To be sure the table is not set right. As I remember how things used to look at home there should be a mustache cup at Uncle Hiram’s plate, so he could drink his floating island without getting his

cream-separators mussy, and there ought to be a vinegar cruet at one end and a silver cake basket at the other and about nine kinds of pickles and jellies scattered round; and in the center of the table there should be a winter bouquet—a nice, hard, firm, dark red winter bouquet—containing, among other things, a sheaf of wheat, a dried cockscomb and a couple of oak galls. Yet if the real provender is forthcoming I can put up with the absence of the proper settings and decorations.”

He had ample leisure for these thoughts, because, as you yourself may have noticed, in a large restaurant when you order anything that is out of the ordinary—which means anything that is ordinary—it takes time to put the proposition through the proper channels. The waiter lays your application before the board of governors, and after the board of governors has disposed of things coming under the head of unfinished business and good of the order it takes a vote, and if nobody blackballs you the treasurer is instructed to draw a warrant and

22 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

the secretary engrosses appropriate resolutions, and your order goes to the cook.

But finally this man's food arrived. And he looked at it and sniffed at it daintily—like a reluctant patient going under the ether—and he tasted of it; and then he put his face down in his hands and burst into low, poignant moans. For it wasn't the real thing at all. The stuffing of the turkey defied chemical analysis; and, moreover, the turkey before serving should have been dusted with talcum powder and fitted with dress-shields, it being plainly a crowning work of the art preservative—meaning by that the cold-storage packing and pickling industry. And if you can believe what Doctor Wiley says—and if you can't believe the man who has dedicated his life to warning you against the things which you put in your mouth to steal away your membranes, whom can you believe?—the cranberry sauce belonged in a paint store and should have been labeled Easter-egg dye, and the green peas were green with Paris green.

As for the plum pudding, it was one of those burglar-proof, enamel-finished prod-

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 23

ucts that prove the British to be indeed a hardy race. And, of course, they hadn't brought him his coffee along with his dinner, the management having absolutely refused to permit of a thing so revolutionary and unprecedented and one so calculated to upset the whole organization. And at the last minute the racial instincts of the cook had triumphed over his instructions, and he had impartially imbued everything with his native brews, gravies, condiments, seasonings, scents, preservatives, embalming fluids, liquid extracts and perfumeries. So, after weeping unrestrainedly for a time, the man paid the check, which was enormous, and tipped everybody freely and went away in despair and, I think, committed suicide on an empty stomach. At any rate, he came no more. The moral of this fable is, therefore, that it can't be done.

But why can't it be done? I ask you that and pause for a reply. Why can't it be done? It is conceded, I take it, that in the beginning our cookery was essentially of the soil. Of course when our forebears came over they brought along with them certain

24 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

inherent and inherited Old World notions touching on the preparation of raw provender in order to make it suitable for human consumption; but these doubtless were soon fused and amalgamated with the cooking and eating customs of the original or copper-colored inhabitants. The difference in environment and climate and conditions, together with the amplified wealth of native supplies, did the rest. In Merrie England, as all travelers know, there are but three staple vegetables—to wit, boiled potatoes, boiled turnips, and a second helping of the boiled potatoes. But here, spread before the gladdened vision of the newly arrived, and his to pick and choose from, was a boundless expanse of new foodstuffs—birds, beasts and fishes, fruits, vegetables and berries, roots, herbs and sprouts. He furnished the demand and the soil was there competently with the supply.

We owe a lot to our red brother. From him we derived a knowledge of the values and attractions of the succulent clam, and he didn't cook a clam so that it tasted like O'Somebody's Heels of New Rubber either.

From the Indian we got the original idea of the shore dinner and the barbecue, the planked shad and the hoeecake. By following in his footsteps we learned about succotash and hominy. He conferred upon us the inestimable boon of his maize—hence corn bread, corn fritters, fried corn and roasting ears; also his pumpkin and his sweet potato—hence the pumpkin pie of the North and its blood brother of the South, the sweet-potato pie. From the Indian we got the tomato—let some agriculturist correct me if I err—though the oldest inhabitant can still remember when we called it a love apple and regarded it as poisonous. From him we inherited the crook-neck squash and the okra gumbo and the rattle-snake watermelon and the wild goose plum, and many another delectable thing.

So, out of all this and from all this our ancestors evolved cults of cookery which, though they differed perhaps as between themselves, were all purely American and all absolutely unapproachable. France lent a strain to New Orleans cooking and Spain did the same for California. Scrapple was

26 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

Pennsylvania's, terrapin was Maryland's, the baked bean was Massachusetts', and along with a few other things spoon-bread ranked as Kentucky's fairest product. Indiana had dishes of which Texas wotted not, nor kilowatted either, this being before the day of electrical cooking contrivances. Virginia, mother of presidents and of natural-born cooks, could give and take cookery notions from Vermont. Likewise, this condition developed the greatest collection of cooks, white and black alike, that the world has ever seen. They were inspired cooks, needing no notes, no printed score to guide them. They could burn up all the cook-books that ever were printed and still cook. They cooked by ear.

And perhaps they still do. If so, may Heaven bless and preserve them! Some carping critics may contend that our grandfathers and grandmothers lacked the proper knowledge of how to serve a meal in courses. Let 'em. Let 'em carp until they're as black in the face as a German carp. For real food never yet needed any vain pomp and circumstance to make it attractive. It stands

on its own merits, not on the scenic effects. When you really have something to eat you don't need to worry trying to think up the French for napkin. Perhaps there may be some among us here on this continent who, on beholding a finger-bowl for the first time, glanced down into its pellucid depths and wondered what had become of the gold fish. There may have been a few who needed a laprobe drawn up well over the chest when eating grapefruit for the first time. Indeed, there may have been a few even whose execution in regard to consuming soup out of the side of the spoon was a thing calculated to remind you of a bass tuba player emptying his instrument at the end of a hard street parade.

But I doubt it. These stories were probably the creations of the professional humorists in the first place. Those who are given real food to eat may generally be depended upon to do the eating without undue noise or excitement. The gross person featured in the comic papers, who consumes his food with such careless abandon that it is hard to tell whether the front

28 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

of his vest was originally drygoods or groceries, either doesn't exist in real life or else never had any food that was worth eating, and it didn't make any difference whether he put it on the inside of his chest or the outside.

Only a short time ago I saw a whole turkey served for a Thanksgiving feast at a large restaurant. It vaunted itself as a regular turkey and was extensively charged for as such on the bill. It wasn't though. It was an ancient and a shabby ruin—a genuine antique if ever there was one, with those high-polished knobs all down the front, like an old-fashioned highboy, and Chippendale legs. To make up for its manifold imperfections the chef back in the kitchen had crowded it full of mysterious laboratory products and then varnished it over with a waterproof glaze or shellac, which rendered it durable without making it edible. Just to see that turkey was a thing calculated to set the mind harking backward to places and times when there had been real turkeys to eat.

Back yonder in the old days we were a

simple and a husky race, weren't we? Boys and girls were often fourteen years old before they knew oysters didn't grow in a can. Even grown people knew nothing, except by vague hearsay, of cheese so runny that if you didn't care to eat it you could drink it. There was one traveled person then living who was reputed to have once gone up to the North somewhere and partaken of a watermelon that had had a plug cut in it and a whole quart of imported real Paris—France—champagne wine poured in the plugged place. This, however, was generally regarded as a gross exaggeration of the real facts.

But there was a kind of a turkey that they used to serve in those parts on high state occasions. It was a turkey that in his younger days ranged wild in the woods and ate the mast. At the frosted coming of the fall they penned him up and fed him grain to put an edge of fat on his lean; and then fate descended upon him and he died the ordained death of his kind. But, oh! the glorious resurrection when he reached the table! You sat with weapons poised and

30 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

ready—a knife in the right hand, a fork in the left and a spoon handy—and looked upon him and watered at the mouth until you had riparian rights.

HIS breast had the vast brown fullness that you see in pictures of old Flemish friars. His legs were like rounded columns and unadorned, moreover, with those superfluous paper frills; and his tail was half as big as your hand and it protruded grandly, like the rudder of a treasure-ship, and had flanges of sizzled richness on it. Here was no pindling fowl that had taken the veil and lived the cloistered life; here was no wiredrawn and trained-down cross-country turkey, but a lusty giant of a bird that would have been a cassowary, probably, or an emu, if he had lived, his bosom a white mountain of lusciousness, his interior a Golconda and not a Golgotha. At the touch of the steel his skin crinkled delicately and fell away; his tissues flaked off in tender strips; and from him arose a bouquet of smells more varied and more delectable than anything ever turned out by the justly celebrated Islands of Spice. It was a sin

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 31

to cut him up and a crime to leave him be.

He had not been stuffed by a taxidermist or a curio collector, but by the master hand of one of those natural-born home cooks—stuffed with corn bread dressing that had oysters or chestnuts or pecans stirred into it until it was a veritable mine of goodness, and this stuffing had caught up and retained all the delectable drippings and essences of his being, and his flesh had the savor of the things upon which he had lived—the sweet acorns and beechnuts of the woods, the buttery goobers of the plowed furrows, the shattered corn of the horse yard.

Nor was he a turkey to be eaten by the mere slice. At least, nobody ever did eat him that way—you ate him by rods, poles and perches, by townships and by sections—ate him from his neck to his hocks and back again, from his throat latch to his crupper, from center to circumference, and from pit to dome, finding something better all the time; and when his frame was mainly denuded and loomed upon the platter like a scaffolding, you dug into his cadaver and found there small hidden joys and titbits.

32 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

You ate until the pressure of your waistband stopped your watch and your vest flew open like an engine-house door and your stomach was pushing you over on your back and sitting upon you, and then you half closed your eyes and dreamed of cold-sliced turkey for supper, turkey hash for breakfast the next morning and turkey soup made of the bones of his carcass later on. For each state of that turkey would be greater than the last.

There still must be such turkeys as this one somewhere. Somewhere in this broad and favored land, untainted by notions of foreign cookery and unvisited by New York and Philadelphia people who insist on calling the waiter *garçon*, when his name is Gabe or Roscoe, there must be spots where a turkey is a turkey and not a cold-storage corpse. And this being the case, why don't those places advertise, so that by the hundreds and the thousands men who live in hotels might come from all over in the fall of the year and just naturally eat themselves to death?

Perchance also the sucking pig of the

good old days still prevails in certain sheltered vales and glades. He, too, used to have his vogue at holiday times. Because the gods did love him he died young—died young and tender and unspoiled by the world—and then everybody else did love him too. For he was barbered twice over and shampooed to a gracious pinkiness by a skilled hand, and then, being basted, he was roasted whole with a smile on his lips and an apple in his mouth, and sometimes a bow of red ribbon on his tail, and his juices from within ran down his smooth flanks and burnished him to perfection. His interior was crammed with stuff and things and truck and articles of that general nature—I'm no cooking expert to go into further particulars, but whatever the stuffing was, it was appropriate and timely and suitable, I know that, and there was onion in it and savory herbs, and it was exactly what a sucking pig needed to bring out all that was good and noble in him.

You began operations by taking a man's-size slice out of his midriff, bringing with it a couple of pinky little rib bones, and then

34 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

you ate your way through him and along him in either direction or both directions until you came out into the open and fell back satiated and filled with the sheer joy of living, and greased to the eyebrows. I should like to ask at this time if there is any section where this brand of sucking pig remains reasonably common and readily available? In these days of light house-keeping and kitchenettes and gas stoves and electric cookers, is there any oven big enough to contain him? Does he still linger on or is he now known in his true perfection only on the magazine covers and in the Christmas stories?

As a further guide to those who in the goodness of their hearts may undertake a search for him in his remaining haunts and refuges, it should be stated that he was no German wild boar, or English pork pie on the hoof, and that he was never cooked French style, or doctored up with anchovies, caviar, *marrons glacés*, pickled capers out of a bottle—where many of the best capers of the pickled variety come from—imported truffles, Mexican tamales or Hawaiian poi.



"THOSE WHO IN THE GOODNESS OF THEIR HEARTS
MAY UNDERTAKE A SEARCH FOR THE SUCKING PIG"

He was—and is, if he still exists—just a plain little North American baby-shoat cooked whole. And don't forget the red apple in his mouth. None genuine without this trademark.

But, shucks! what's the use of talking that way? Patriotism is not dead and a democratic form of government still endures, and surely real sucking pigs are still being cooked and served whole somewhere this very day. And in that same neighborhood, if it lies to the eastward, there are cooks who know the art of planking a shad in season—not the arrangement of the effete East, consisting of a greased skin wrapped round a fine-tooth comb and reposing on a charred clapboard—but a real shad; and if it lies to the southward one will surely find in the same vicinity a possum of a prevalent dark brown tint, with sweet potatoes baked under him and a certain inimitable, indescribable dark rich gravy surrounding him, and on the side corn pones—without any sugar in them. I think probably the reason why the possum doesn't flourish in the North is that they insist on tacking an O on to his name,

38 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

simply because some misguided writer of dictionaries ordained it so. A possum is not Irish, nor is he Scotch. His name is not Opossum, neither is it MacPossum. He belongs to an old Southern family and his name is just possum.

Once I saw ostensible 'possum at a French restaurant in New York. It was advertised as *Opossum, Southern style*, and it was chopped up fine and cooked in a sort of casserole effect, with green peas and carrots and various other things mixed in along with it. The quivering sensations which were felt throughout the South on this occasion, and which at the time were mistaken for earthquake tremors, were really caused by so many Southern cooks turning over petulantly in their graves.

Still going on the assumption that the turkey and the sucking pig and their kindred spirits are yet to be found among us or among some of us, anyhow, it is only logical to assume that the food is not served in courses at the ratio of a little of everything and not enough of anything, but that it is brought on and spread before the company

all together and at once—the turkey or the pig or the ham or the chickens; the mashed potatoes overflowing their receptacle like drifted snow; the celery; the scalloped oysters in a dish like a crock; the jelly layer cake, the fruit cake and Prince of Wales cake; and in addition, scattered about hither and yon, all the different kinds of preserves—pusserves, to use the proper title—including sweet peach pickles dimpled with cloves and melting away in their own sweetness, and watermelon-rind pickles cut into cubes just big enough to make one bite—that is to say in cubes about three inches square—and the various kinds of jellies—crab-apple, currant, grape and quince—quivering in an ecstasy as though at their very goodness, and casting upon the white cloth where the light catches them all the reflected, dancing tints of beryl and amethyst, ruby and garnet—crown-jewels in the diadem of real food.

People who eat dinners like this must, by the very nature of things, cling also to the ancient North American custom of starting the day with an amount of regular food called collectively a breakfast. This, of

40 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

course, does not mean what the dweller in the city by the seaboard calls a breakfast, he knowing no better, poor wretch—a swallow of tea, a bite of a cold baker's roll, a plate of gruel mayhap, or pap, and a sticky spoonful of the national marmalade of Perfidious Albumen, as the poet has called it, followed by a slap at the lower part of the face with a napkin and a series of V-shaped hiccoughs ensuing all the morning. No, indeed.

In speaking thus of breakfast, I mean a real breakfast. If it's in New England there'll be doughnuts and pies on the table, and not those sickly convict labor pies of the city either, with the prison pallor yet upon them, but brown, crusty, full-chested pies. And if it's down South there will be hot waffles and fresh New Orleans molasses; and if it's in any section of our country, north or south, east or west, such comfits and kickshaws as genuine country smoked sausage, put up in bags and spiced like Araby the Blest, and fresh eggs fried in pairs—never less than in pairs—with their lovely orbéd yolks turned heavenward like



"WHERE DO YOU FIND THE PERCENTAGE OF DYSPEPTICS
RUNNING HIGHEST?"

the topaz eyes of beauteous prayerful blondes; and slices of home-cured ham with the taste of the hickory smoke and also of the original hog delicately blended in them, and marbled with fat and lean, like the edges of law books; and cornbeef hash, and flaky hot biscuits; and an assortment of those same pickles and preserves already mentioned; the whole being calculated to make a hungry man open his mouth until his face resembles the general-delivery window at the post-office—and sail right in.

The cry has been raised that American cooking is responsible for American dyspepsia, and that as a race we are given to pouring pepsin pellets down ourselves because of the food our ancestors poured down themselves. This is a base calumny. Old John J. Calumny himself never coined a baser one. You have only to look about you to know the truth of the situation, which is, that the person with the least digestion is the one who always does the most for it, and that those who eat the most have the least trouble. Where do you find the percentage of dyspeptics running highest, in the coun-

44 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

try or the city? Where do you find the stout woman who is banting as she pants and panting as she bants? Again, the city. Where do you encounter the unhappy male creature who has been told that the only cure for his dyspepsia is to be a Rebecca at the Well and drink a gallon of water before each meal and then go without the meal, thus compelling him to double in both roles and first be Rebecca and then be the Well? Where do you see so many of those miserable ones who have the feeling, after eating, that rude hands are tearing the tapestries off the walls of their respective dining rooms?

Not in the country, where, happily, food is perhaps yet food. In the city, that's where—in the cities, where they have learned to cook food and to serve it and to eat it after a fashion different from the fashions their grandsires followed.

That's a noble slogan which has lately been promulgated—See America First. But while we're doing so wouldn't it be a fine idea to try to see some American cooking?

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

MUSIC



Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

Music

IF YOU, the reader, are anything like me, the writer, it happens to you about every once in so long that some well-meaning but semi-witted friend rigs a dead-fall for you, and traps you and carries you off, a helpless captive, for an evening among the real music-lovers.

Catching you, so to speak, with your defense leveled and your breastworks unmanned, he speaks to you substantially as follows: "Old man, we're going to have a few people up to the house tonight—just a little informal affair, you understand, with a song or two and some music—and the missus and I would appreciate it mightily if you'd put on your Young Prince Charmings and drop in on us along toward eight. How about it—can we count on you to be among those prominently present?"

48 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

Forewarned is forearmed, and you know all about this person already. You know him to be one of the elect in the most exclusive musical coterie of your fair city, wherever your fair city may be. You know him to be on terms of the utmost intimacy with the works of all the great composers. Bill Opus and Jeremiah Fugue have no secrets from him—none whatever—and in conversation he creates the impression that old Issy Sonata was his first cousin. He can tell you offhand which one of the Shuberts—Lee or Jake—wrote that Serenade. He speaks of Mozart and Beethoven in such a way a stranger would probably get the idea that Mote and Bate used to work for his folks. He can go to a musical show, and while the performance is going on he can tell everybody in his section just which composer each song number was stolen from, humming the original air aloud to show the points of resemblance. He can do this, I say, and, what is more, he does do it. At the table d'hôte place, when the Neapolitan troubadours come out in their little green jackets and their wide red sashes he is right

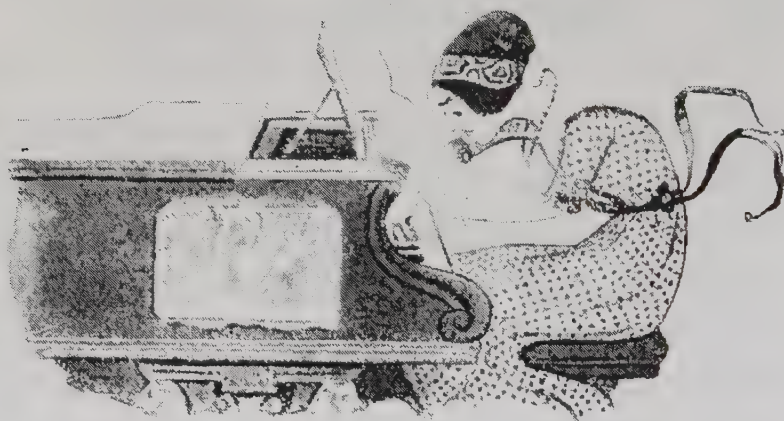
there at the middle table, poised and waiting; and when they put their heads together and lean in toward the center and sing their national air, Come Into the Garlic, Maud, it is he who beats time for them with his handy lead-pencil, only pausing occasionally to point out errors in technic and execution on the part of the performers. He is that kind of a pest, and you know it.

What you should do under these circumstances, after he has invited you to come up to his house, would be to look him straight in the eye and say to him: "Well, old chap, that's awfully kind of you to include me in your little musical party, and just to show you how much I appreciate it and how I feel about it here's something for you." And then hit him right where his hair parts with a cut-glass paperweight or a bronze clock or a fire-ax or something, after which you should leap madly upon his prostrate form and dance on his cozy corner with both feet and cave in his inglenook for him. That is what you should do, but, being a vacillating person—I am still assuming, you see, that you are constituted as I am—you weakly

50 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

surrender and accept the invitation and promise to be there promptly on time, and he goes away to snare more victims in order to have enough to make a mess.

And so it befalls at the appointed time that you deck your form in your after-six-P. M. clothes and go up. On the way you get full and fuller of dark forebodings at every step; and your worst expectations are realized as soon as you enter and are relieved of your hat by a colored person in white gloves, and behold spread before you a great horde of those ladies and gentlemen whose rapt expressions and general air of eager expectancy stamp them as true devotees of whatever is most classical in the realm of music. You realize that in such a company as this you are no better than a rank outsider, and that it behooves you to attract as little attention as possible. There is nobody else here who will be interested in discussing with you whether the Giants or the Cubs will finish first next season; nobody except you who cares a whoop how Indiana will go for president—in fact, most of them probably haven't heard that Indiana



" SHE TRIES TO TEAR ALL ITS FRONT TEETH OUT
WITH HER BARE HANDS "

was thinking of going. Their souls are soaring among the stars in a rarefied atmosphere of culture, and even if you could you wouldn't dare venture up that far with yours, for fear of being seized by an uncontrollable impulse to leap off and end all, the same as some persons are affected when on the roof of a tall building. So you back into the nearest corner and try to look like a part of the furniture—and wait in dumb misery.

Usually you don't have to wait very long. These people are beggars for punishment and like to start early. It is customary to lead off the program with a selection on the piano by a distinguished lady graduate of somebody-with-an-Italian-name's school of piano expression. Under no circumstances is it expected that this lady will play anything that you can understand or that I could understand. It would be contrary to the ethics of her calling and deeply repugnant to her artistic temperament to play a tune that would sound well on a phonograph record. This would never do. She comes forward, stripped for battle, and

54 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

bows and peels off her gloves and fiddles with the piano-stool until she gets it adjusted to suit her, and then she sits down, prepared to render an immortal work composed by one of the old masters who was intoxicated at the time.

She starts gently. She throws her head far back and closes her eyes dreamily, and hits the keys a soft, dainty little lick—tippy-tap! Then leaving a call with the night clerk for eight o'clock in the morning, she seems to drift off into a peaceful slumber, but awakens on the moment and hurrying all the way up to the other end of Main Street she slams the bass keys a couple of hard blows—bumetty-bum! And so it goes for quite a long spell after that: Tippy-tap!—off to the country for a week-end party, Friday to Monday; bumetty-bum!—six months elapse between the third and fourth acts; tippetty-tip!—two years later; dear me, how the old place has changed! Biffetty-biff! Gracious, how time flies, for here it is summer again and the flowers are all in bloom! You sink farther and farther into your chair and debate with yourself

whether you ought to run like a coward or stay and die like a hero. One of your legs goes to sleep and the rest of you envies the leg. You can feel your whiskers growing, and you begin to itch in two hundred separate places, but can't scratch.

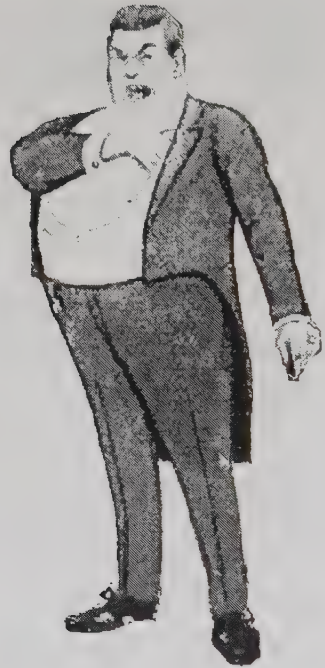
The strangest thing about it is that those round you appear to be enjoying it. Incredible though it seems, they are apparently finding pleasure in this. You can tell that they are enjoying themselves because they begin to act as real music-lovers always act under such circumstances—some put their heads on one side and wall up their eyes in a kind of dying-calf attitude and listen so hard you can hear them listening, and some bend over toward their nearest neighbors and murmur their rapture. It is all right for them to murmur, but if you so much as scrooge your feet, or utter a low, despairing moan or anything, they all turn and glare at you reproachfully and go "Sh!" like a collection of steam-heating fixtures. Depend on them to keep you in your place!

All of a sudden the lady operator comes out of her trance. She comes out of it with

56 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

a violent start, as though she had just been bee-stung. She now cuts loose, regardless of the piano's intrinsic value and its associations to its owners. She skitters her flying fingers up and down the instrument from one end to the other, producing a sound like hailstones falling on a tin roof. She grabs the helpless thing by its upper lip and tries to tear all its front teeth out with her bare hands. She fails in this, and then she goes mad from disappointment and in a frenzy resorts to her fists.

As nearly as you are able to gather, a terrific fire has broken out in one of the most congested tenement districts. You can hear the engines coming and the hook-and-ladder trucks clattering over the cobbles. Ambulances come, too, clanging their gongs, and one of them runs over a dog; and a wall falls, burying several victims in the ruin. At this juncture persons begin jumping out of the top-floor windows, holding cooking stoves in their arms, and a team runs away and plunges through a plate-glass window into a tinware and crockery store. People are all running round and shrieking, and the



'RO-HOCKED IN THE CRA-HADLE OF THE DA-HEEF
I LA-HAY ME DOWN IN PE-HEACE TO SA-LEEP!"

dog that was run over is still yelping—he wasn't killed outright evidently, but only crippled—and several tons of dynamite explode in a basement.

As the crashing reverberations die away the lady arises, wan but game, and bows low in response to the applause and backs away, leaving the wreck of the piano jammed back on its haunches and trembling like a leaf in every limb

All to yourself, off in your little corner, you are thinking that surely this has been suffering and disaster enough for one evening and everybody will be willing to go away and seek a place of quiet. But no. In its demand for fresh horrors this crowd is as insatiate as the ancient Romans used to be when Nero was giving one of those benefits at the Colosseum for the fire sufferers of his home city. There now advances to the platform a somber person of a bass aspect, he having a double-yolk face and a three-ply chin and a chest like two or three chests.

You know in advance what the big-mouthed black bass is going to sing—there is only one regular song for a bass singer to

60 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

sing. From time to time insidious efforts have been made to work in songs for basses dealing with the love affairs of Bedouins and the joys of life down in a coal mine; but after all, to a bass singer who really values his gift of song and wishes to make the most of it, there is but one suitable selection, beginning as follows:

*Ro-hocked in the cra-hadle of the da-heep,
I la-hay me down in pe-heace to sa-leep!
Collum and pa-heaceful be my sa-leep
Ro-hocked in the cra-hadle of the da-heep!*

That is the orthodox offering for a bass. The basses of the world have always used it, I believe, and generally to advantage. From what I have been able to ascertain I judge that it was first written for use on the Ark. Shem sang it probably. If there is anything in this doctrine of heredity Ham specialized in banjo solos and soft-shoe dancing, and Japhet, I take it, was the tenor—he certainly had a tenor-sounding kind of a name. So it must have been Shem, and undoubtedly he sang it when the animals



"SHEM UNDOUBTEDLY SANG IT
WHEN THE ANIMALS WERE HUNGRY"

were hungry, so as to drown out the sounds of their roaring.

So this, his descendant—this chip off the old cheese, as it were—stands up on the platform facing you, with his chest well extended to show his red suspender straps peeping coyly out from the arm openings of his vest, and he inserts one hand into his bosom, and over and over again he tells you that he now contemplates laying himself down in peace to sleep—which is more than anybody else on the block will be able to do; and he rocks you in the cradle of the deep until you are as seasick as a cow. You could stand that, maybe, if only he wouldn't make faces at you while he sings. Some day I am going to take the time off to make scientific research and ascertain why all bass singers make faces when they are singing. Surely there's some psychological reason for this, and if there isn't it should be stopped by legislative enactment.

When Sing-Bad the Sailor has quit rocking the boat and gone ashore, a female singer generally obliges and comes off the nest after a merry lay, cackling her triumph.

64 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

Then there is something more of a difficult and painful nature on the piano; and nearly always, too, there is a large lady wearing a low-vamp gown on a high-arch form, who in flute-like notes renders one of those French ballads that's full of la-las and is supposed to be devilish and naughty because nobody can understand it. For the finish, some person addicted to elocution usually recites a poem to piano accompaniment. The poem Robert of Sicily is much used for these purposes, and whenever I hear it Robert invariably has my deepest sympathy and so has Sicily. Toward midnight a cold collation is served, and you recapture your hat and escape forth into the starry night, swearing to yourself that never again will you permit yourself to be lured into an orgy of the true believers.

But the next time an invitation comes along you will fall again. Anyhow that's what I always do, meanwhile raging inwardly and cursing myself for a weak and spineless creature, who doesn't know when he's well off. Yet I would not be regarded as one who is insensible to the charms of

music. In its place I like music, if it's the kind of music I like. These times, when so much of our music is punched out for us by machinery like buttonholes and the air vents in Swiss cheese, and then is put up in cans for the trade like Boston beans and baking-powder, nothing gives me more pleasure than to drop a nickel in the slot and hear an inspiring selection by the author of Alexander's Ragtime Band.

I am also partial to band music. When John Philip Sousa comes to town you can find me down in the very front row. I appreciate John Philip Sousa when he faces me and shows me that breast full of medals extending from the whiskerline to the belt-line, and I appreciate him still more when he turns round and gives me a look at that back of his. Since Colonel W. F. Cody practically retired and Miss Mary Garden went away to Europe, I know of no public back which for inherent grace and poetry of spinal motion can quite compare with Mr. Sousa's.

I am in my element then. I do not care so very much for Home, Sweet Home, as

66 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

rendered with so many variations that it's almost impossible to recognize the old place any more; but when they switch to a march, a regular Sousa march full of um-pahs, then I begin to spread myself. A little tingle of anticipatory joy runs through me as Mr. Sousa advances to the footlights and first waves his baton at the great big German who plays the little shiny thing that looks like a hypodermic and sounds like stepping on the cat, and then turns the other way and waves it at the little bit of a German who plays the big thing that looks like a ventilator off an ocean liner and sounds like feeding-time at the zoo. And then he makes the invitation general and calls up the brasses and the drums and the woods and the woodwinds, and also the thunders and the lightnings and the cyclones and the earthquakes.

And three or four of the trombonists pull the slides away out and let go full steam right in my face, with a blast that blows my hair out by the roots, and all hands join in and make so much noise that you can't hear the music. And I enjoy it more than words can tell!



AND I ENJOY IT
MORE THAN WORDS CAN TELL!"

On the other hand, grand wopra does not appeal to me. I can enthuse over the robin's song in the spring, and the sound of the summer wind rippling through the ripened wheat is not without its attractions for me; but when I hear people going into convulsions of joy over Signor Massacre's immortal opera of *Medulla Oblongata* I feel that I am out of my element and I start backpedaling. Lucy D. Lammermore may have been a lovely person, but to hear a lot of foreigners singing about her for three hours on a stretch does not appeal to me. I have a better use for my little two dollars. For that amount I can go to a good minstrel show and sit in a box.

You may recall when Strauss' *Elektra* was creating such a furor in this country a couple of years ago. All the people you met were talking about it whether they knew anything about it or not, as generally they didn't. I caught the disease myself; I went to hear it sung.

I only lasted a little while—I confess it unabashedly—if there is such a word as unabashedly—and if there isn't then I con-

70 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

fess it unashamedly. As well as a mere layman could gather from the opening proceedings, this opera of Elektra was what the life story of the Bender family of Kansas would be if set to music by Fire-Chief Croker. In the quieter moments of the action, when nobody was being put out of the way, half of the chorus assembled on one side of the stage and imitated the last ravings of John McCullough, and the other half went over on the other side of the stage and clubbed in and imitated Wallace, the Untamable Lion, while the orchestra, to show its impartiality, imitated something else—Old Home Week in a boiler factory, I think. It moved me strangely—strangely and also rapidly.

Taking advantage of one of these periods of comparative calm I arose and softly stole away. I put a dummy in my place to deceive the turnkeys and I found a door provisionally unlocked and I escaped out into the night. Three or four thousand automobiles were charging up and down Broadway, and there was a fire going on a couple of blocks up the street, and I think a suf-

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 71

fragette procession was passing, too; but after what I'd just been through the quiet was very soothing to my eardrums. I don't know when I've enjoyed anything more than the last part of Elektra, that I didn't hear.

Yet my reader should not argue from this admission that I am deaf to the charms of the human voice when raised in song. Un-naturalized aliens of a beefy aspect vocalizing in a strange tongue while an orchestra of two hundreds pieces performs—that, I admit, is not for me. But just let a pretty girl in a white dress with a flower in her hair come out on a stage, and let her have nice clear eyes and a big wholesome-looking mouth, and let her open that mouth and show a double row of white teeth that'd remind you of the first roasting ear of the season—just let her be all that and do all that, and then let her look right at me and sing *The Last Rose of Summer* or *Annie Laurie* or *Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms*—and I am hers to command, world without end, forever and ever, amen! My eyes cloud up for a rainy

72 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

spell, and in my throat there comes a lump so big I feel like a coach-whip snake that has inadvertently swallowed a china darning-egg. And when she is through I am the person sitting in the second row down front who applauds until the flooring gives way and the plastering is jarred loose on the next floor. She can sing for me by the hour and I'll sit there by the hour and listen to her, and forget that there ever was such a person in the whole world as the late Vogner! That's the kind of a music-lover I am, and I suspect, if the truth were known, there are a whole lot more just like me.

If I may be excused for getting sort of personal and reminiscent at this point I should like to make brief mention here of the finest music I ever heard. As it happened this was instrumental music. I had come to New York with a view to revolutionizing metropolitan journalism, and journalism had shown a reluctance amounting to positive diffidence about coming forward and being revolutionized. Pending the time when it should see fit to do so, I was stopping at a boarding house on West Fifty-

Seventh Street. It has been my observation that practically everybody who comes to New York stops for a while in a boarding house on West Fifty-Seventh Street.

West Fifty-Seventh Street was where I was established, in a hall bedroom on the top floor—a hall bedroom so form-fitting and cozy that when I went to bed I always opened the transom to prevent a feeling of closeness across the chest. If I had as many as three callers in my room of an evening and one of them got up to go first, the others had to sit quietly while he was picking out his own legs. But up to the time I speak of I hadn't had any callers. I hadn't been there very long and I hadn't met any of the other boarders socially, except at the table. I had only what you might call a feeding acquaintance with them.

Christmas Eve came round. I was a thousand miles from home and felt a million. I shouldn't be surprised if I was a little bit homesick. Anyhow it was Christmas Eve, and it was snowing outside according to the orthodox Christmas Eve formula, and upward of five million other people in

74 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

New York were getting ready for Christmas without my company, co-operation or assistance. You'd be surprised to know how lonesome you can feel in the midst of five million people—until you try it on a Christmas Eve.

After dinner I went up to my room and sat down with my back against the door and my feet on the window-ledge, and I rested one elbow in the washpitcher and put one knee on the mantel and tried to read the newspapers. The first thing I struck was a Christmas poem, a sentimental Christmas poem, full of allusions to the family circle, and the old homestead, and the stockings hanging by the fireplace, and all that sort of thing.

That was enough. I put on my hat and overcoat and went down into the street. The snow was coming down in long, slanting lines and the sidewalks were all white, and where the lamplight shone on them they looked like the frosting on birthday cakes. People laden with bundles were diving in and out of all the shops. Every other shop window had a holly wreath hung in it, and

when the doors were opened those spicy Christmassy smells of green hemlock and pine came gushing out in my face.

So far as I could tell, everybody in New York—except me—was buying something for his or her or some other body's Christmas. It was a tolerably lonesome sensation. I walked two blocks, loitering sometimes in front of a store. Nobody spoke to me except a policeman. He told me to keep moving. Finally I went into a little family liquor store. Strangely enough, considering the season, there was nobody there except the proprietor. He was reading a German newspaper behind the bar. I conferred with him concerning the advisability of an egg-nog. He had never heard of such a thing as an egg-nog. I mentioned two old friends of mine, named Tom and Jerry, respectively, and he didn't know them either. So I compromised on a hot lemon toddy. The lemon was one that had grown up with him in the liquor business, I think, and it wasn't what you would call a spectacular success as a hot toddy; but it was warming, anyhow, and that helped. I

76 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

expanded a trifle. I asked him whether he wouldn't take something on me.

He took a small glass of beer! He was a foreigner and he probably knew no better, so I suppose I shouldn't have judged him too harshly. But it was Christmas Eve and snowing outside—and he took a small beer!

I paid him and came away. I went back to my hall bedroom up on the top floor and sat down at the window with my face against the pane, like Little Maggie in the poem.

By now the pavements were two inches deep in whiteness and in the circle of light around an electric lamp up at the corner of Ninth Avenue I could see, dimly, the thick, whirling white flakes chasing one another about madly, playing a Christmas game of their own. Across the way foot-passengers were still passing in a straggly stream. I heard the flat clatter of feet upon the stairs outside, heard someone wish somebody else a Merry Christmas, and heard the other person grunt in a non-committal sort of way. There was the sound of a hall door slamming somewhere on my floor.

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 77

After that there was silence—the kind of silence that you can break off in chunks and taste.

It continued to snow. I reckon I must have sat there an hour or more.

Down in the street four stories below I heard something—music. I raised the sash and looked out. An Italian had halted in front of the boarding house with a grind organ and he was turning the crank and the thing was playing. It wasn't much of a grind organ as grind organs go. I judge it must have been the original grind organ that played with Booth and Barrett. It had lost a lot of its most important works, and it had the asthma and the heaves and one thing and another the matter with it.

But the tune it was playing was My Old Kentucky Home—and Kentucky was where I'd come from. The Italian played it through twice, once on his own hook and once because I went downstairs and divided my money with him.

I regard that as the finest music I ever heard.

As I was saying before, the classical stuff

78 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

may do for those who like it well enough to stand it, but the domestic article suits me. I like the kind of beer that this man Bach turned out in the spring of the year, but I don't seem to be able to care much for his music. And so far as Chopin is concerned, I hope you'll all do your Christmas Chopin early.

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

A R T



Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

A r t

IN ART as in music I am one who is very easily satisfied. All I ask of a picture is that it shall look like something, and all I expect of music is that it shall sound like something.

In this attitude I feel confident that I am one of a group of about seventy million people in this country, more or less, but only a few of us, a very heroic few of us, have the nerve to come right out and take a firm position and publicly express our true sentiments on these important subjects. Some are under the dominion of strong-minded wives. Some hesitate to reveal their true artistic leanings for fear of being called low-browed vulgarians. Some are plastic posers and so pretend to be something they are not to win the approval of the ultra-intellectuals. There are only a handful of

82 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

us who are ready and willing to go on record as saying where we stand.

It is because of this cowardice on the part of the great silent majority that every year sees us backed farther and farther into a corner. We walk through miles and miles of galleries, or else we are led through them by our wives and our friends, and we look in vain for the kind of pictures that mother used to make and father used to buy. What do we find? Once in a while we behold a picture of something that we can recognize without a chart, and it looms before our gladdened vision like a rock-and-rye in a weary land. But that is not apt to happen often—not in a 1912-model gallery. In such an establishment one is likely to meet only Old Masters and Young Messers. If it's an Old Master we probably behold a Flemish saint or a German saint or an Italian saint—depending on whether the artist was Flemish or German or Italian—depicted as being shot full of arrows and enjoying same to the uttermost. If it is a Young Messer the canvas probably presents to us a view of a poached egg apparently



"WE LOOKED IN VAIN FOR THE KIND OF PICTURES
THAT MOTHER USED TO MAKE AND FATHER USED TO BUY"

bursting into a Welsh rarebit. At least that is what it looks like to us—a golden buck, forty cents at any good restaurant—in the act of undergoing spontaneous combustion. But we are informed that this is an impressionistic interpretation of a sunset at sea, and we are expected to stand before it and carry on regardless.

But I for one must positively decline to carry on. This sort of thing does not appeal to me. I don't want to have to consult the official catalogue in order to ascertain for sure whether this year's prize picture is a quick lunch or an Italian gloaming. I'm very peculiar that way. I like to be able to tell what a picture aims to represent just by looking at it. I presume this is the result of my early training. I date back to the Rutherford B. Hayes School of Interior Decorating. In a considerable degree I am still wedded to my early ideals. I distinctly recall the time when upon the walls of every wealthy home of America there hung, among other things, two staple oil paintings—a still-life for the dining room, showing a dead fish on a plate, and a pastoral for the

86 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

parlor, showing a collection of cows drinking out of a purling brook. A dead fish with a glazed eye and a cold clammy fin was not a thing you would care to have around the house for any considerable period of time, except in a picture, and the same was true of cows. People who could not abide the idea of a cow in the kitchen gladly welcomed one into the parlor when painted in connection with the above purling brook and several shade trees.

Those who could not afford oil paintings went in for steel engravings and chromos—good reliable brands, such as the steel engraving of Henry Clay's Farewell to the American Senate and the Teaching Baby to Waltz art chromo. War pictures were also very popular back in that period. If it were a Northern household you could be pretty sure of seeing a work entitled Gettysburg, showing three Union soldiers, two plain and one colored, in the act of repulsing Pickett's charge. If it were a Southern household there would be one that had been sold on subscription by a strictly non-partisan publishing house in Charleston, South

Carolina, and guaranteed to be historically correct in all particulars, representing Robert E. Lee chasing U. S. Grant up a palmetto tree, while in the background were a large number of deceased Northern invaders neatly racked up like cordwood.

Such things as these were a part of the art education of our early youth. Along with them we learned to value the family photograph album, which fastened with a latch like a henhouse door, and had a nap on it like a furred tongue, and contained, among other treasures, the photograph of our Uncle Hiram wearing his annual collar.

And there were also enlarged crayon portraits in heavy gold frames with red plush insertions, the agent having thrown in the portraits in consideration of our taking the frames; and souvenirs of the Philadelphia Centennial; and wooden scoop shovels heavily gilded by hand with moss roses painted on the scoop part and blue ribbon bows to hang them up by; and on the what-not in the corner you were reasonably certain of finding a conch shell with the Lord's Prayer engraved on it; and if you held the shell up

88 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

to your young ear you could hear the murmur of the sea just as plain as anything. Of course you could secure the same murmuring effect by holding an old-fashioned tin cuspidor up to your ear, too, but in this case the poetic effect would have been lacking. And, besides, there were other uses for the cuspidor.

Almost the only Old Masters with whose works we were well acquainted were John L. Sullivan and Nonpareil Jack Dempsey. But Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair suited us clear down to the ground—her horses looked like real horses, even if they were the kind that haul brewery wagons; and in the matter of sculpture Powers' Greek Slave seemed to fill the bill to the satisfaction of all. Anthony Comstock and the Boston Purity League had not taken charge of our art as yet, and nobody seemed to find any fault because the Greek lady looked as though she'd slipped on the top step and come down just as she was, wearing nothing to speak of except a pair of handcuffs. Nobody did speak of it either—not in a mixed company anyhow.

Furniture was preferred when it was new—the newer the better. We went in for golden oak and for bird's eye maple, depending on whether we liked our furniture to look tanned or freckled; and when the careful housekeeper threw open her parlor for a social occasion, such as a funeral, the furniture gave off a splendid new sticky smell, similar to a paint and varnish store on a hot day. The vogue for antiques hadn't got started yet; that was to descend upon us later on. We rather liked the dining-room table to have all its legs still, and the bureau to have drawers that could be opened without blasting. In short, that was the period of our national life when only the very poor had to put up with decrepit second-hand furniture, as opposed to these times when only the very rich can afford to own it. If you have any doubts regarding this last assertion of mine I should advise you to drop into any reliable antique shop and inquire the price of a mahogany sideboard suffering from tetter and other skin diseases, or a black walnut cupboard with doors that froze up solid about

90 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

the time of the last Seminole War. I suppose these things go in cycles—in fact, I'm sure they do. Some day the bare sight of the kind of furniture which most people favor nowadays will cause a person of artistic sensibilities to burst into tears, just as the memory of the things that everybody liked twenty-five or thirty years ago gives such poignant pain to so many at present.

Even up to the time of the World's Fair quite a lot of people still favored the simpler and more understandable forms of art expression. We went to Chicago and religiously visited the Art Building, and in our nice new creaky shoes we walked past miles and miles of brought-on paintings by foreign artists, whose names we could not pronounce, in order to find some sentimental domestic subject. After we had found it we would stand in front of it for hours on a stretch with the tears rolling down our cheeks. Some of us wept because the spirit of the picture moved us, and some because our poor tired feet hurt us and the picture gave us a good excuse for crying in public, and so we did so—freely and openly.

Grant if you will that our taste was crude and raw and provincial, yet we knew what we liked and the bulk of us weren't ashamed to say so, either. What we liked was a picture or a statue which remotely at least resembled the thing that it was presumed to represent. Likewise we preferred pictures of things that we ourselves knew about and could understand.

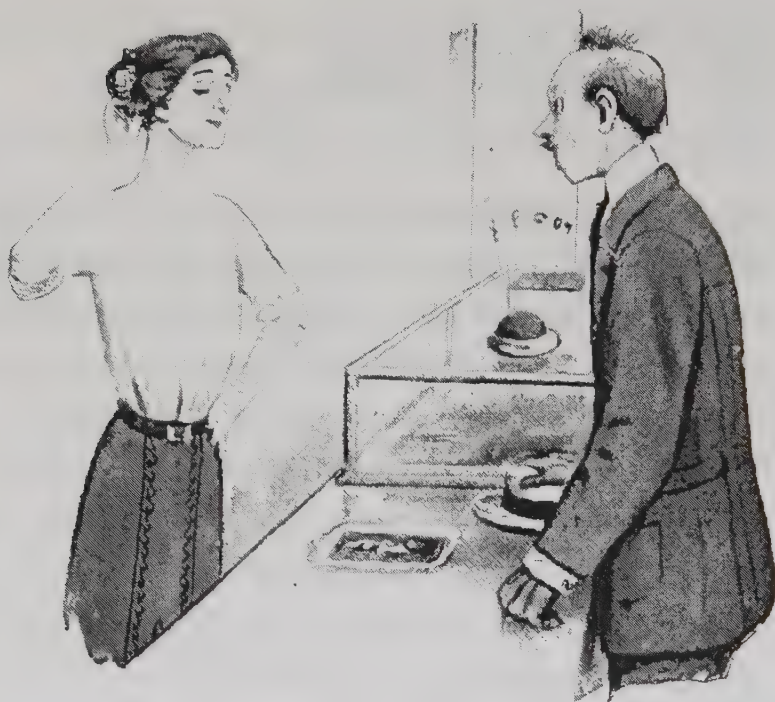
Maybe it was because of that early training that a good many of us have never yet been able to work up much enthusiasm over the Old Masters. Mind you, we have no quarrel with those who become incoherent and babbling with joy in the presence of an Old Master, but—doggone 'em!—they insist on quarreling with us because we think differently. We fail to see anything ravishingly beautiful in a faded, blistered, cracked, crumbling painting of an early Christian martyr on a grill, happily frying on one side like an egg—a picture that looks as though the Old Master painted it some morning before breakfast, when he wasn't feeling the best in the world, and then wore it as a liver pad for forty or fifty years. We

92 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

cannot understand why they love the Old Masters so, and they cannot understand why we prefer the picture of Custer's Last Stand that the harvesting company used to give away to advertise its mowing machines.

Once you get away from the early settlers among the Old Masters the situation becomes different. Rembrandt and Hals painted some portraits that appeal deeply to the imagination of nearly all of my set. The portraits which they painted not only looked like regular persons, but so far as my limited powers of observation go, they were among the few painters of Dutch subjects who didn't always paint a windmill or two into the background. It probably took great resolution and self-restraint, but they did it and I respect them for it.

I may say that I am also drawn to the kind of ladies that Gainsborough and Sir Joshua Reynolds painted. They certainly turned out some mighty good-looking ladies in those days, and they were tasty dressers, too, and I enjoy looking at their pictures. Coming down the line a little farther, I want to state that there is also something



THE INSCRUTABLE SMILE OF A SALESLADY
WOULD MAKE MONA LISA SEEM A MERE AMATEUR"

very fascinating in those soft-boiled pink ladies, sixteen hands high, with sorrel manes, that Bouguereau did; and the soldier pictures of Meissonier and Detaille appeal to me mightily. Their soldiers are always such nice neat soldiers, and they never have their uniforms mussed up or their accouterments disarranged, even when they are being shot up or cut down or something. Corot and Rousseau did some landscapes that seem to approximate the real thing, and there are several others whose names escape me; but, speaking for myself alone, I wish to say that this is about as far as I can go at this writing. I must admit that I have never been held spellbound and enthralled for hours on a stretch by a contemplation of the inscrutable smile on Mona Lisa. To me she seems merely a lady smiling about something—simply that and nothing more.

Any woman can smile inscrutably; that is one of the specialties of the sex. The inscrutable smile of a saleslady in an exclusive Fifth Avenue shop when a customer asks to look at something a little cheaper would make Mona Lisa seem a mere amateur as

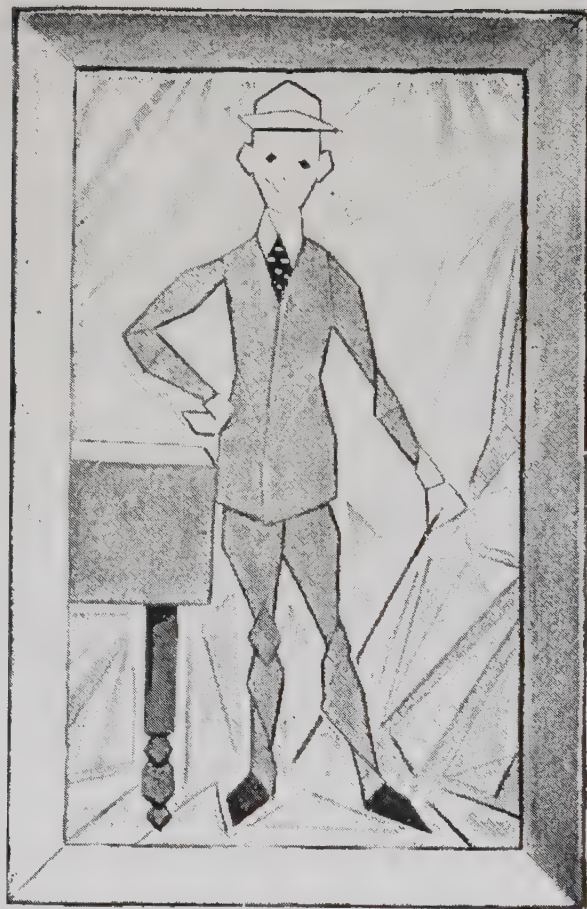
96 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

an inscrutable smiler. Quite a number of us remained perfectly calm when some gentlemen stole Miss Lisa out of the Louvre, and we expect to remain equally calm if she is never restored.

As I said before, our little band is shrinking in numbers day by day. The population as a whole are being educated up to higher ideals in art. On the wings of symbolism and idealism they are soaring ever higher and higher, until a whole lot of them must be getting dizzy in the head by now.

First, there was the impressionistic school, which started it; and then there was the post-impressionistic school, suffering from the same disease but in a more violent form; and here just recently there have come along the Cubists and the Futurists.

You know about the Cubists? A Cubist is a person who for reasons best known to the police has not been locked up yet, who asserts that all things in Nature, living and inanimate, properly resolve themselves into cubes. What is more, he goes and paints pictures to prove it—pictures of cubic waterfalls pouring down cubic precipices,



"A PERSON WHO FOR REASONS BEST KNOWN
TO THE POLICE HAS NOT BEEN LOCKED UP"

and cubic ships sailing on cubic oceans, and cubic cows being milked by cubic milkmaids. He makes portraits, too—portraits of persons with cubic hands and cubic feet, who are smoking cubeb cigarettes and have solid cubiform heads. On that last proposition we are with them unanimously; we will concede that there are people in this world with cube-shaped heads, they being the people who profess to enjoy this style of picture.

A Futurist begins right where a Cubist leaves off, and gets worse. The Futurists have already had exhibitions in Paris and London and last Spring they invaded New York. They call themselves art anarchists. Their doctrine is a simple and a cheerful one—they merely preach that whatever is normal is wrong. They not only preach it, they practice it.

Here are some of their teachings:

“We teach the plunge into shadowy death under the white set eyes of the ideal!

“The mind must launch the flaming body, like a fire-ship, against the enemy, the

100 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

eternal enemy that, if he do not exist, must be invented!

"The victory is ours—I am sure of it, for the maniacs are already hurling their hearts to heaven like bombs! Attention! Fire! Our blood? Yes! All our blood in torrents to redye the sickly auroras of the earth! Yes, and we shall also be able to warm thee within our smoking arms, O wretched, decrepit, chilly Sun, shivering upon the summit of the Gorisankor!"

There you have the whole thing, you see, simply, dispassionately and quietly presented. Most of us have seen newspaper reproductions of the best examples of the Futurists' school. As well as a body can judge from these reproductions, a Futurist's method of execution must be comparatively simple. After looking at his picture, you would say that he first put on a woolly overcoat and a pair of overshoes; that he then poured a mixture of hearth paint, tomato catsup, liquid bluing, burnt cork, English mustard, Easter dyes and the yolks of a dozen eggs over himself, seasoning to taste with red peppers. Then he spread a large

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 101

tarpaulin on the floor and lay down on it and had an epileptic fit, the result being a picture which he labeled *Revolt, or Collision Between Two Heavenly Bodies, or Premature Explosion of a Custard Pie, or something else equally appropriate*. The Futurists ought to make quite a number of converts in this country, especially among those advanced lovers of art who are beginning to realize that the old impressionistic school lacked emphasis and individuality in its work. But I expect to stand firm, and when everybody else nearly is a Futurist and is tearing down Sargent's pictures and Abbey's and Whistler's to make room for immortal Young Messers, I and a few others will still be holding out resolutely to the end.

At such times as these I fain would send my thoughts back longingly to an artist who flourished in the town where I was born and brought up. He was practically the only artist we had, but he was versatile in the extreme. He was several kinds of a painter rolled into one—house, sign, portrait, landscape, marine and wagon. In his lighter

102 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

hours, when building operations were dull, he specialized in oil paintings of life and motion—mainly pictures of horse races and steamboat races. When he painted a horse race, the horses were always shown running neck and neck with their mouths wide open and their eyes gleaming; and their nostrils were widely extended and painted a deep crimson, and their legs were neatly arranged just so, and not scrambled together in any old fashion, as seems to be the case with the legs of the horses that are being painted nowadays. And when he painted a steamboat race it would always be the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee coming down the river abreast in the middle of the night, with the darkies dancing on the lower decks and heavy black smoke rolling out of the smokestacks in four distinct columns—one column to each smokestack—and showers of sparks belching up into the vault of night.

There was action for you—action and attention to detail. With this man's paintings you could tell a horse from a steamboat at a glance. He was nothing of an impressionist; he never put smokestacks on the



"COLLISION BETWEEN TWO HEAVENLY BODIES
OR PREMATURE EXPLOSION OF A CUSTARD PIE"

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 105

horse nor legs on the steamboat. And his work gave general satisfaction throughout that community.

Frederic Remington wasn't any impressionist either; and so far as I can learn he didn't have a cubiform idea in stock. When Remington painted an Indian on a pony it was a regular Indian and a regular pony—not one of those cotton-batting things with fat legs that an impressionist slaps on to a canvas and labels a horse. You could smell the lathered sweat on the pony's hide and feel the dust of the dry prairie tickling your nostrils. You could see the slide of the horse's withers and watch the play of the naked Indian's arm muscles. I should like to enroll as a charter member of a league of Americans who believe that Frederic Remington and Howard Pyle were greater painters than any Old Master that ever turned out blistered saints and fly-blown cherubim. And if every one who secretly thinks the same way about it would only join in—of course they wouldn't, but if they would—we'd be strong enough to elect a president on a platform calling for a pro-

106 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

hibitive tariff against the foreign-pauper-labor Old Masters of Europe.

While we were about it our league could probably do something in the interests of sculpture. It is apparent to any fair-minded person that sculpture has been very much overdone in this country. It seems to us there should be a law against perpetuating any of our great men in marble or bronze or stone or amalgam fillings until after he has been dead a couple of hundred years, and by that time a fresh crop ought to be coming on and probably we shall have lost the desire to create such statues.

A great man who cannot live in the affectionate and grateful memories of his fellow countrymen isn't liable to live if you put up statues of him; that, however, is not the main point.

The artistic aspect is the thing to consider. So few of our great men have been really pretty to look at. Andrew Jackson made a considerable dent in the history of his period, but when it comes to beauty, there isn't a floor-walker in a department store anywhere that hasn't got him backed clear off

the pedestal. In addition to that, the sort of clothes we've been wearing for the last century or so do not show up especially well in marble. Putting classical draperies on our departed solons has been tried, but carving a statesman with only a towel draped over him, like a Roman senator coming out of a Turkish bath, is a departure from the real facts and must be embarrassing to his shade. The greatest celebrities were ever the most modest of men. I'll bet the spirit of the Father of His Country blushes every time he flits over that statue of himself alongside the Capitol at Washington—the one showing him sitting in a bath cabinet with nothing on but a sheet.

Sticking to the actual conditions doesn't seem to help much either. Future generations will come and stand in front of the statue of a leader of thought who flourished back about 1840, say, and wonder how anybody ever had feet like those and lived. Horace Greeley's chin whiskers no doubt looked all right on Horace when he was alive, but when done in bronze they invariably present a droopy not to say dropsical

108 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

appearance; and the kind of bone-handled umbrella that Daniel Webster habitually carried has never yet been successfully worked out in marble. When you contemplate the average statue of Lincoln—and most of them, as you may have noticed, are very average—you do not see there the majesty and the grandeur and the abiding sorrow of the man and the tragedy of his life. At least I know I do not see those things. I see a pair of massive square-toed boots, such as I'm sure Father Abe never wore—he couldn't have worn 'em and walked a step—and I see a beegum hat weighing a ton and a half, and I say to myself: "This is not the Abraham Lincoln who freed the slaves and penned the Gettysburg address. No, sir! A man with those legs would never have been president—he'd have been in a dime museum exhibiting his legs for ten cents a look—and they'd have been worth the money too "

Nobody seems to have noticed it, but we undoubtedly had the cube form of expression in our native sculpture long before it came out in painting.

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 109

To get a better idea of what I'm trying to drive at, just take a trip up through Central Park the next time you are in New York and pause a while before those bronzes of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns which stand on the Mall. They are called bronzes, but to me they always looked more like castings. I don't care if you are as Scotch as a haggis, I know in advance what your feelings will be. If you decide that these two men ever looked in life like those two bronzes you are going to lose some of your love and veneration for them right there on the spot; or else you are going to be filled with an intense hate for the persons who have libeled them thus, after they were dead and gone and not in position to protect themselves legally. But you don't necessarily have to come to New York—you've probably got some decoration in your home town that is equally sad. There've been a lot of good stone-masons spoiled in this country to make enough sculptors to go round.

But while we are thinking these things about art and not daring to express them, I

110 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

take note that new schools may come and new schools may go, but there is one class of pictures that always gets the money and continues to give general satisfaction among the masses.

I refer to the moving pictures.

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

SPORT



Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

Sport

AS I UNDERSTAND it, sport is hard work for which you do not get paid. If, for hire, you should consent to go forth and spend eight hours a day slamming a large and heavy hammer at a mark, that would be manual toil, and you would belong to the union and carry a card, and have political speeches made to you by persons out for the labor vote. But if you do this without pay, and keep it up for more than eight hours on a stretch, it then becomes sport of a very high order—and if you continue it for a considerable period of time, at more or less expense to yourself, you are eventually given a neat German-silver badge, costing about two dollars, which you treasure devotedly ever after. A man who walks twenty-five miles a day for a month without getting anything for it—except two

114 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

lines on the sporting page—is a devotee of pedestrianism, and thereby acquires great merit among his fellow athletes. A man who walks twenty-five miles a day for a month and gets paid for it is a letter-carrier.

Also sport is largely a point of view. A skinny youth who flits forth from a gymnasium attired in the scenario of a union suit, with a design of a winged Welsh rarebit on his chest, and runs many miles at top speed through the crowded marts of trade, is highly spoken of and has medals hung on him. If he flits forth from a hospital somewhat similarly attired, and does the same thing, the case is diagnosed as temporary insanity—and we drape a strait-jacket on him and send for his folks. Such is the narrow margin that divides Marathon and mania; and it helps to prove that sport is mainly a state of mind.

I am speaking now with reference to our own country. Different nations have different conceptions of this subject. Golf and eating haggis in a state of original sin are the national pastimes of the Scotch, a hardy race. At submarine boating and military

ballooning the French acknowledge no superiors. Their balloons go up and never come down, and their submarines go down and never come up. The Irish are born club swingers, as witness any police force; and the Swiss, as is well known, have no equals at Alpine mountain climbing, chasing cuckoos into wooden clocks, and running hotels. I've always believed that, if the truth were only known, the reason why the Swiss Family Robinson did so well in that desert clime was because they opened a hotel and took in the natives to board.

Among certain branches of the Teutonic races the favorite indoor sport is suicide by gas, and the favorite outdoor sport is going to a *schutzenfest* and singing *Ach du lieber Augustin!* coming home. To Italy the rest of us are indebted for unparalleled skill in eating spaghetti with one tool—they use the putting iron all the way round. Our cousins, the English, excel at archery, tea-drinking and putting the fifty-six pound protest. Thus we lead the world at contesting Olympian games and winning them, and they lead the world at losing them first and then con-

116 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

testing them. In catch-as-catch-can wrestling between Suffragettes and policemen the English also hold the present championship at all weights. And so it goes.

We in America have a range of sports and pastimes that is as wide as our continent, which is fairly wide as continents go. In using the editorial we here I do not mean, however, to include myself. At sport I am no more than an inoffensive onlooker. One time or another I have tried many of our national diversions and have found that those which are not strenuous enough are entirely too strenuous for a person of fairly settled habits. It is much easier to look on and less fatiguing to the system. I find that the best results along sporting lines are attained by taking a comfortable seat up in the grandstand, lighting a good cigar and leaning back and letting somebody else do the heavy work. Reading about it is also a very good way.

Take fishing, now, for example. What can be more delightful on a bright, pleasant afternoon, when the wind is in exactly the right quarter, than to take up a standard

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 117

work on fishing, written by some gifted traveling passenger agent, and with him to snatch the elusive finny tribe out of their native element, while the reel whirs deliriously and the hooked trophy leaps high in air, struggling against the feathered barb of the deceptive lure, and a waiter is handy if you press the button? I have forgotten the rest of the description; but any railroad line making a specialty of summer-resort business will be glad to send you the full details by mail, prepaid. In literature, fishing is indeed an exhilarating sport; but, so far as my experience goes, it does not pan out when you carry the idea farther.

To begin with, there is the matter of tackle. Some people think collecting orchids is expensive—and I guess it is, the way the orchid market is at present; and some say matching up pearls costs money. They should try buying fishing tackle once. If J. Pierpont Morgan had gone in for fishing tackle instead of works of art he would have died in the hands of a receiver. Any self-respecting dealer in sporting goods would be ashamed to look his dependent

118 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

family in the face afterward if he suffered you to escape from his lair equipped for even the simplest fishing expedition unless he had sawed off about ninety dollars' worth of fishing knickknacks on you.

Let us say, then, that you have mortgaged the old home and have acquired enough fishing tackle to last you for a whole day. Then you go forth, always conceding that you are an amateur fisherman who fishes for fun as distinguished from a professional fisherman who fishes for fish—and you get into a rowboat that you undertake to pull yourself and that starts out by weighing half a ton and gets half a ton heavier at each stroke. You pull and pull until your spine begins to unravel at both ends, and your palms get so full of water blisters you feel as though you were carrying a bunch of hothouse grapes in each hand. And after going about nine miles you unwittingly anchor off the mouth of a popular garbage dump and everything you catch is second-hand. The sun beats down upon you with unabated fervor and the back of your neck colors up like a meerschaum pipe; and after



"EVERYTHING YOU CATCH
IS SECOND-HAND "

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 121

about ten minutes you begin to yearn with a great, passionate yearning for a stiff collar and some dry clothes, and other delights of civilization.

If, on the other hand, I am being guided by an experienced angler it has been my observation that he invariably takes me to a spot where the fish bit greedily yesterday and will bite avariciously tomorrow, but, owing to a series of unavoidable circumstances, are doing very little in the biting line today. Or if by any chance they should be biting they at once contract an intense aversion for my goods. Others may catch them as freely as the measles, but toward me fish are never what you would call infectious. I'm one of those immunes. Or else the person in charge forgets to bring any bait along. This frequently happens when I am in the party.

One day last summer I went fishing in the Savannah River, and we traveled miles and miles to reach the fishing-ground. We found the water there alive with fish, and anchored where they were thickest; and then the person who was guiding the expedition discov-

122 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

ered that he had left the bait on the wharf. He is the most absent-minded man south of the Ohio anyhow. In the old days before Georgia went dry he had to give up carrying a crook-handled umbrella. He would invariably leave it hanging on the rail. So I should have kept the bait in mind myself—but I didn't, being engaged at the time in sun-burning a deep, radiant magenta. However it was not a fast color—long before night it was peeling off in long, painful strips.

Suppose you do catch something! You cast and cast, sometimes burying your hook in submerged débris and sometimes in tender portions of your own person. After a while you land a fish; but a fish in a boat is rarely so attractive as he was in a book. One of the drawbacks about a fish is that he becomes dead so soon—and so thoroughly.

I have been speaking thus far of river fishing. I would not undertake to describe at length the joys of brook fishing, because I tried it only once. Once was indeed sufficient, not to say ample. On this occasion I was chaperoned by an old, experienced

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 123

brook fisherman. I was astonished when I got my first view of the stream. It seemed to me no more than a trickle of moisture over a bed of boulders—a gentle perspiration coursing down the face of Nature, as it were. Any time they tapped a patient for dropsy up that creek there would be a destructive freshet, I judged; but, as it developed, this brook was deceptive—it was full of deep, cold holes. I found all these holes.

I didn't miss a single one. While I was finding them and then crawling out of them, my companion was catching fish. He caught quite a number, some of them being nearly three inches long. They were speckled and had rudimentary gills and suggestions of fins, and he said they were brook trout—and I presume they were; but if they had been larger they would have been sardines. You cannot deceive me regarding the varieties of fish that come in cans. I would say that the best way to land a brook trout is to go to a restaurant and order one from a waiter in whom you have confidence. In that way you will avoid those deep holes.

124 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

Nor have I ever shone as a huntsman. If the shadowy roeshad is not for me neither is her cousin, the buxom roebuck. Nor do I think I will ever go in for mountain-climbing as a steady thing, having tried it. Poets are fond of dwelling upon the beauties of the everlasting hills, swimming in purple and gold—but no poet ever climbed one. If he ever did he would quit boosting and start knocking. I was induced to scale a large mountain in the northern part of New York. It belonged to the state; and, like so many other things the state undertakes to run, it was neglected. No effort whatever had been made to make it cozy and comfortable for the citizen. It was one of those mountains that from a distance look smooth and gentle of ascent, but turn out to be rugged and seamy and full of rocks with sharp corners on them at about the height of the average human knee or shin. The lady for whom that mountain in Mexico, Chapultepec, is named—oh, yes, Miss Anna Peck—would have had a perfectly lovely time scaling that mountain; but I didn't.

After we had climbed upward at an acute



"HE COULD BEAT ME CLIMBING,
BUT AT PANTING I HAD HIM LICKED TO A WHISPER"

angle for several hundred miles—my companion said yards, but I know better; it was miles—I threw myself prone upon the softer surfaces of a large granite slab, feeling that I could go no farther. I also wished to have plenty of room in which to pant. He could beat me climbing, but at panting I had him licked to a whisper. He was a person without sympathy. In his bosom the milk of human kindness had clabbered and turned to a brick-cheese. He stood there and laughed. There are times to laugh, but this was not one of the times. Anyway I always did despise those people who are built like sounding boards and have fine acoustic qualities inside their heads—and not much of anything else; but never did I despise them more than at that moment. He sent his grating, raucous, discordant, ill-timed guffaws reverberating off among the precipitous crags, and then he turned from me and went forging ahead.

He was almost out of sight when I remembered about there being bears on that mountain; so I rose and undertook to forge ahead too. I was not a great success at it

128 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

however. I know now that if ever I should turn to a life of crime forgery would not be my forte. I do not forge readily. Eventually, though, I reached the summit, he being already there. We had come up for the view, but I seemed to have lost my interest in views; so, while he looked at the view, I reclined in a prostrate position and resumed panting. That was three years ago and I am still somewhat behind with my pants. I am going to take a week off sometime and pant steadily and try to catch up; but the outing taught me one thing—I learned a simple way of descending a steep mountain. If one is of a circular style of construction it is very simple. One rolls.

Camping is highly spoken of, and I have tried camping a number of times. When I go camping it rains. It begins to rain when I start and it keeps on raining until I come back. It never fails. I have often thought that drought-sufferers in various parts of the country who seek to attract rain in dry spells make a mistake. They try the old-fashioned Methodist way of praying for it, or the new scientific way of shooting dynamite bombs

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 129

off and trying to blast it out of the heavens; when, as a matter of fact, the best plan would be to send for me and get me to go camping in the arid district. It would then rain heavily and without cessation.

It is a fine thing to talk about the perfumed and restful bed of balsam boughs, and the crackle of the campfire at dusk, and the dip in the mirrored bosom of the pelucid lake at dawn—old Emerson Hough does all that to perfection; but these things assume a different aspect when it rains. There are three conditions in life when any latent selfishness in a man's being, however far down it may be buried ordinarily, will come surging to the surface—when he is courting a girl against strong opposition; when he is playing a gentleman's game of poker, purely for sociability; and when he is camping out and it rains. Before a man makes up his mind that he will take a girl to be his wife he should induce her to go in surf bathing and see how she looks when she comes out; and before he makes up his mind that he will take a man to be his best friend he should go camping with him in the rainy

130 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

season—the answer in both cases being that then he won't do either one.

I remember going camping once with a man who before that had appeared to be all that one could ask in the way of a chosen comrade; but after we had spent four days cooped up together in an eight-by-ten tent that was built with sloping shoulders, like an Englishman's overcoat, listening to the sough of the wind through the wet pine trees without, and dodging the streams of water that percolated through the dripping roof within, I could think of more than seven thousand things about that man that I cordially disliked.

His whiskers gradually became the most distasteful of all to me. Either he hadn't brought a razor along or it was too wet for shaving—or something; and his whiskers grew out, and they were bristly and red in color, which was something I had not suspected before. As I sat there with the little rivulets running down the back of my neck and the rust forming on my amalgam fillings and mold on my shoes and mushrooms sprouting under my hatband, it seemed to

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 131

me that he had taken an unfair advantage of me by having red whiskers. Viewed through the drizzle they appeared to be the reddest, the most inflammatory, the most poisonous-looking whiskers I ever saw! They were too red to be natural.

I decided finally that he must have been scared by a Jersey bull so that his whiskers turned red in a single night—and I was getting ready to twit him about it; but he beat me to it. It seemed that all this time he had been feeling more and more deeply offended at the way in which my ears were adjusted to my head. He couldn't make up his mind, he said, which way he would hate me more—with my ears or without them; but he was willing to take a butcher knife and experiment. He also said that, as an expert bookkeeper, he wouldn't know whether to enter my ears as outstanding losses or amounts brought forward. Going into those woods we were just the same as Damon and Pythias; but coming out his bite would have been instant death, and I felt toward him exactly as the tarantula does

132 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

toward the centipede. We were the original Blue-Gum Twins.

Coming now to aquatic sports as distinguished from pastimes ashore, I feel that I am better qualified to speak authoritatively, having had more experience in that direction. Let us start with canoeing. Canoeing is a sport fraught with constant surprises. A canoeing trip is rarely the same thing twice in succession; and particularly is this true in streams where the temperature of the water is subject to change. It is comparatively easy to paddle a canoe if you only remember to scoop toward you. You merely reverse the process by which truly refined people imbibe soup. Even if you never master the art of paddling you may still get along fairly well if you know how to swim. On the whole I would say that one is liable to enjoy a longer career as a canoeist where one swims but can't paddle, than where one paddles but can't swim.

Approaching the subject of motor-boating as compared with sailboating, we find the situation becoming complicated and growing technical. In sailing, as is gener-

ally known, you depend upon the wind; and there are only two things the wind does—one is to blow and the other is not to blow. But when you begin to figure up the things that a motor boat will do when you don't want it to, and won't do when you do want it to, you are face to face with one of the most complicated mathematical jobs known to the realm of mechanical science.

A motor boat undoubtedly has a larger and fancier repertoire of cute tricks and unexpected ways than anything in the nature of machinery. I know this to be true, because I have a relative who suffers from motor-boatitis in an advanced form. He has owned many different brands of motor boats—that is one reason, I think, why he is not wealthier; in fact he has had about all the kinds there are except a kind that will start when you wish it to and stop when you expect it to. His motor boats do nearly everything—backfire, and fail to spark, and clog up, and blow up, and break down, and smash up and drift ashore, and drift out from shore, and have the asthma and the heaves and impediments of speech; but he

134 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

has never yet owned one that could be depended upon to do the two things I have just mentioned.

After trying various models and discarding them, he now has one of the most complete motor boats made. It has what is known as a hunting cabin, it being so called, I think, because the moment anybody gets into it he has to get out again while the owner crawls in and takes up all the seats and hunts for something. It is the theory that one could live afloat in this hunting cabin—and so one could if one were only a dachshund and inured to exposure. It is plenty wide enough for the average dachshund and plenty high enough, too, but not more than about two-thirds long enough. If one were a dachshund one would either have to coil up or else remain partly outdoors. Also, on board is a galley, which would be a success in every way if you could find a style of cook who could get used to sitting on one hole of the stove while he cooked on the other. One of those talented parlor magicians who does light housekeeping in a borrowed high hat by breaking raw

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 135

eggs into it and then taking out omelet souffles, might fill the bill—only I never have chanced to see a parlor magician yet who could crowd himself and his feet into that galley at the same time.

The principal feature of this motor boat, however, is the engine, which is a very complicated and beautiful thing, with coils and plugs and brakes strewed about over it here and there, and a big flywheel superimposed right in front. It is the theory that, by opening several cocks and closing several others, and adjusting about fifteen or twenty little duffickers just so, and then revolving this wheel briskly with a crank provided for that purpose, the engine can be started. It is supposed to say chug-chug a couple of times impatiently, and then go scooting away, chug-chugging like an inspired slide-trombone.

Such is the theory, but such is not the fact. I've seen the owner crank her until his backbone comes unjointed, without getting any response whatsoever. And then, just when he is about to succumb to hate and overexertion, the thing says tut-tut reprovingly—and

136 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

then gives one tired pish and a low mournful tush and coughs about a pint of warm gasoline into his face and dies as dead as Jesse James. I've seen her do that time and time again; but if she ever does start, the only way to stop her is to steer into some solid immovable object, such as the Western Hemisphere.

At that, motor-boating for an amateur such as I am has certain advantages over sailboating. A motor-boatist—even the most reckless kind—knows enough to stay ashore when a West Indian hurricane is romping along the coast, playfully chasing its own tail like a young puppy; but that kind of a situation is just pie for your seasoned sailboatist.

Only last summer I had a very distressing experience in connection with a sailboat, which was owned by a friend of mine—or perhaps I should say he was a friend of mine until this matter came up. From the clubhouse porch I had often admired his boat skimming gracefully over the bay, with its sail making a white gore against the blue background; and one day he invited



"SHE WAS NOT MUCH LARGER
THAN A SOAPDISH"

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 139

me to go out with him for a sail. Before I had time for that second thought which is so desirable under such circumstances, I found myself committed to the venture.

Right here, though, I wish to state that if anybody ever gets me out in a small sailboat again it will be over my dead body.

Well, anyway, we cast off, as he called it. I did not like that phrase—cast off—it sounded too much as though one were bidding farewell to all earthly ties—and almost immediately I was struck by other disconcerting facts. The first one was that his boat, which had looked roomy and commodious when viewed from shore, appeared to shrink up so when you were aboard her. Really, she was not much larger than a soap-dish and not nearly so reliable. And another thing I noticed was a lot of the angriest-looking clouds that anybody ever saw, piling up on the horizon. And the waves were slopping up and down, and giving to the water that dark, forbidding appearance that is so inspiring in a marine painting, but so depressing when you are thrown into personal contact with it.

140 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

I made a suggestion As I recall now, I said something about waiting until the typhoon was over; but my friend grinned in an annoying, superior kind of way and said he doubted whether the wind would blow more than half a gale. He was right there—but it was the last half. Anyhow he swung her round and she heeled away over in an alarming fashion, and we headed right into the center of the vortex. He gave me the end of a rope to hold and told me to swing on to it, which I was very glad to do, because there are times and places when it gives you a slight sense of comfort to have anything at all to hold to, even if it is only a rope. On and on we careened madly. I was so occupied with harkening to the howl of the mad winds in the rigging and watching the mad waves that, when he suddenly called out something which sounded like *Hard Ah Lee*, I paid no attention. If his fancy led him in a moment of dire peril like this to be yelling for somebody with a name like a Chinese laundryman, it was no concern of mine.

Then he bellowed: "*Leggo that sheet!*"

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 141

Now I knew there was something about a sailboat called a sheet, but I naturally assumed it was the sail. I leave it to any disinterested person if a sail, being white and more or less square in shape, doesn't look more like a sheet than a mere rope does. So, as I wasn't near the sail, but was merely holding on to my rope, I started to tell him I wasn't touching his blamed old sheet. But the words were never spoken.

The boat tried to shy out from under me and came very nearly succeeding. At the same time, she buckjumped and stood right up on one edge, like a demented gravy dish. At the same moment, also, a considerable portion of the Atlantic Ocean came aboard and lit in my lap, and something struck me alongside the head with frightful force; and something else scraped me off the place where I was sitting and hurled me headlong.

When I came to, the man who owned the boat was scrambling round, stepping on me and my clothes, and grabbing at loose ends, and swearing; but as soon as he had a moment to spare from these other duties he

142 *Cobb's Bill-of-Fare*

called me a derved idiot! I was his guest, mind you, and he used that language toward me.

"You derved idiot!" he said "Didn't you see she was about to jibe?"

I told him in a dignified manner that I certainly did not; that had I known she was about to jibe I would most certainly have jobe with her; that personally I preferred any amount of jibbing, however painful, to being drowned first and then beaten to death. I demanded to know why he had assaulted me upon the head and what he did it with.

It developed, though, that he had not struck me at all. The boom swung round and hit me. This is a heavy section of lumber, and I think it is called a boom from the hollow, ringing sound it makes when dashing out the brains of amateur sailors. In my judgment these booms are dangerous and their presence should not be permitted aboard a sailing craft—or, at least, they should be towed a safe distance aft.

But I digress. Referring to the devastating and angry elements that encompassed us,



" THINK OF BEING LAID FACE DOWNWARD
FIRMLY ACROSS A SINEWY KNEE AND BEATEN FORTY-LOVE
WITH ONE OF THOSE HARD CATGUT RACKETS!"

the owner of the boat said there was now a nice, fresh breeze blowing, and that he hated to miss the fun; but if I preferred to he would run back in and hug the shore. Hug it! I was ready to kiss it! What I wanted to do was to take that dear shore in both arms and press my throbbing cheeks against her mossy breast, and swear that nothing should ever again come between me and the solid part of the continent of North America.

So, by a sheer miracle escaping death on the way, we returned, and I betook myself off of that craft and headed straight for the clubhouse. I wish to take advantage of this opportunity, however, to deny the report subsequently circulated by certain malicious persons to the effect that I was scared. Any passing agitation I may have betrayed was due to my relief at finding that the cyclone, despite its fury, had not swept the North Atlantic Coast bare. I also wish to deny the story that I was pale. I have one of those complexions that come and go. Anybody who knows me will tell you that.

146 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

However, I have decided to give up sail-boating; and, to a person of my shape and conservative tendencies, this leaves the field of outdoor sport considerably circumscribed. I am too peaceful for baseball and not warlike enough for football. I had thought some of taking up tennis, but have been deterred by the fact that so many young women excel at tennis. I could stand being licked by another man, but the idea of facing one of those sinewy young-lady champions whose stalwart face looks out at you from the sporting page is repellent to me.

I can understand why so very few of these ultra-athletic college girls marry off early. A man instinctively is drawn to the clinging-vine type of female. If there is any sturdy oak round the place he wants to be it. But what I cannot understand is how these brawny young persons can be the granddaughters and the great granddaughters of those fragile creatures, with wasp waists and tiny feet, who lived back in the Early Victorian period and suffered from megrims and vapors. I'll venture that none of this generation ever had a vapor in

Cobb's Bill-of-Fare 147

her life; and as for megrims, she wouldn't know one if she met it in the big road. She may be muscle-bound and throw a splint sometimes, or get the Charley horse; but megrims are not for her—believe me!

Oh, I've seen them often—the adorable yet brawny creatures, leaping six feet into the air and smacking a defenseless tennis ball with such vigor that it started right off in the general direction of Sioux Falls at the rate of upwards of ninety miles an hour, and coming down flat-footed without having jostled so much as a hairpin out of place. You may worship them, all right enough, but it is safer to do so at long distance.

Suppose you were hooked up for life to a lady champion and you happened to displease her? She'd spank you! Think of being laid face downward firmly across a sinewy knee and beaten forty-love with one of those hard catgut rackets! The very suggestion is intolerable to a believer in the supremacy of the formerly sterner sex.

So I have decided not to take up tennis; but the doctor says I need exercise, and I

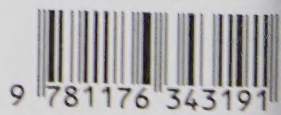
148 Cobb's Bill-of-Fare

think I will go in for golf, which is a young man's vice and an old man's penance. I have already taken the preliminary steps. I have joined a country club; I have also chosen my caddie. He is a deaf-and-dumb caddie, who has never been known to laugh at anything.

That is why I chose him.

LaVergne, TN USA
07 December 2010

207844LV00003B/90/P



9 781176 343191



P7-BHS-551

